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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT.

Thursday, July 16, 1931.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Easier Housework." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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What thoughts come to your mind when you take a walk through an old country churchyard and read the inscriptions on the stones? Bob Adams, whose verses Uncle Ebenezer is so fond of, says that he has very mournful thoughts on such occasions. And they are on the subject of housekeeping. In fact, he has written a poem about it called "Truth and Tombstones." It goes like this:

When through the quiet fields I go
Where side by side sleep high and low,
I seldom see an epitaph
Which tells the truth or even half.
If we could sift the wheat from chaff,
If pious lies no more were read,
But only bitter truth instead,
With little left to soothe and please,
Some stones would tell us facts like these:
"Poor Mary Jones lies in this tomb,
She pushed too far a heavy broom.
Her husband grieves, his sorrow deeper
Because he bought no carpet sweeper."
"In memory of Hetty Burke
Who died of general overwork.
Her husband finds it much more bother
To save one wife than get another.
He'll not be long a widowed weeper,
Hired help is dear, but wives are cheaper."
"Here lies the wife of Hapgood Hicks
Who did the weekly wash for six.
She's glad to rest beneath these sods;
She carried water seven rods."
Life's burdens should be justly shared.
Some husbands could be better spared
Than wives for whom those stones are squared.

But it is often the Mary Joneses and the Hetty Burkes themselves, as much as their husbands, who slave themselves into an early old age by antiquated methods of doing their housework. Fortunately, some sensible people are coming to their rescue today. These early graves are unnecessary, we hear, if women will take an intelligent attitude toward their work and adopt labor

and time savers. That doesn't mean, necessarily, buying a whole lot of expensive equipment. But it does mean good methods.

The experts, you see, are turning their attention from efficiency in business to efficiency in the home. We are hearing about making housework easy, comfortable and interesting.

Gracious! I wonder what some of our stern ancestors would say to such talk. It actually seems that a housekeeper today is to be judged on other points than a strong back and elbow grease.

These experts are talking about saving time and reducing fatigue.

Gracious again! I think I hear Granther Hicks saying, "How long since has women's time been considered valuable?"

But the important point now seems to be not simply how to save money but how to save time and effort as well. Not so much what the housekeeper does, as how she does it. The best housekeeping does not require drudgery from morning to night. The idea is to do the job well, of course, but quickly. Wives and mothers are to be freed of unnecessary burdens so that they and their families will be happier.

Well, all I can say is, that when these household management people begin to stress ways that women can run their homes well without getting tired, I for one am ready to prick up my ears and take notice.

According to the experts there are three points to consider about every household job, large or small.

First. There is one best way of doing the job. This can be discovered by experience. And, once discovered, it ought always to be followed.

Second. This one best way involves speed and system and cuts down fatigue to the lowest point.

Third. The one best way requires suitable tools. (That means one, two, three and out for dull knives, bent saucepans and shaky egg beaters.) Beside suitable tools the best way requires the most physical comfort possible to do the job properly.

The trouble with a lot of us housekeepers is that what goes on in our households is so familiar that we make no effort to analyze it. We are so used to methods handed down from other generations that we never stop to think whether or not they are efficient. What we need is to become our own efficiency experts---to turn a critical eye on the way we are doing even the smallest jobs---even shelling peas or taking new green lima beans out of the pods.

I'll have to stop here long enough to tell you about four-year-old Nancy down our street, who begged to help her mother shell lima beans the other day. She worked and worked over the first pod and finally exclaimed: "I'm afraid you'll have to unbutton these beans yourself, Mother."

You might not think there was an efficient and an inefficient way of shelling peas and beans---a simple little everyday job like that. But suppose you decide to come into your own kitchen someday with a critical eye, and you'll be surprised. For example, suppose you come in and see yourself sitting with your back to the window at work on those peas and thinking of the hundred and one things that ought to be done before dinner time. You will notice first that your shadow is falling on your work. Then, that you are sitting on a stool so high that only your toes touch the floor and that you have left the peas in the paper bag just as they come from the store. This means that you have to rummage in the depths of the bag every time you want another handful of peas. Perhaps you are throwing the shells into a pile on the table and the peas into a bowl so small that it is already heaping and you will need to get up in a minute and replace it with a larger one.

After standing off and looking at yourself doing this job, what will you suggest to yourself? Well, probably your remarks will be something like this: "Arniminta, you are not comfortably seated. Let me show you how to save time and strength. Why not shift your position so that the light will fall on your work? And how about sitting in a lower chair so that you can put your feet comfortably on the floor? Here is a deep pan. If you put the peas directly into this, they can be rinsed without transferring them to another container. Here's another pan for the shells from which they can be dumped directly into the garbage pail. That will save you the bother of clearing them off the table. And for the unshelled beans you will need a large container easy to get at, instead of that awkward floppy bag."

"Me, oh, my," you will reply to yourself when you find how much better this new arrangement works. "Me, oh, my. I never thought of paying attention to the way the work was done, just so it got done."

That is just one example. I could give you plenty of others. One woman told me recently that after becoming her own efficiency expert, she discovered the cause of the tired feeling that set in after a few hours' work. It was her shoes. When she substituted low-heeled, well-fitting sports shoes for the old partly worn slippers she was trying to wear out, her weariness disappeared.

Another housekeeper told me that the fatigue she had been complaining about for years proved to be eye-strain. When the kitchen was painted a light color and lights were put up over the sink and the table, so that she could see to do her work comfortably, the job turned out to be very pleasant and not the drudgery it had always been before.

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Tomorrow: Dinner for July Sunday.

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